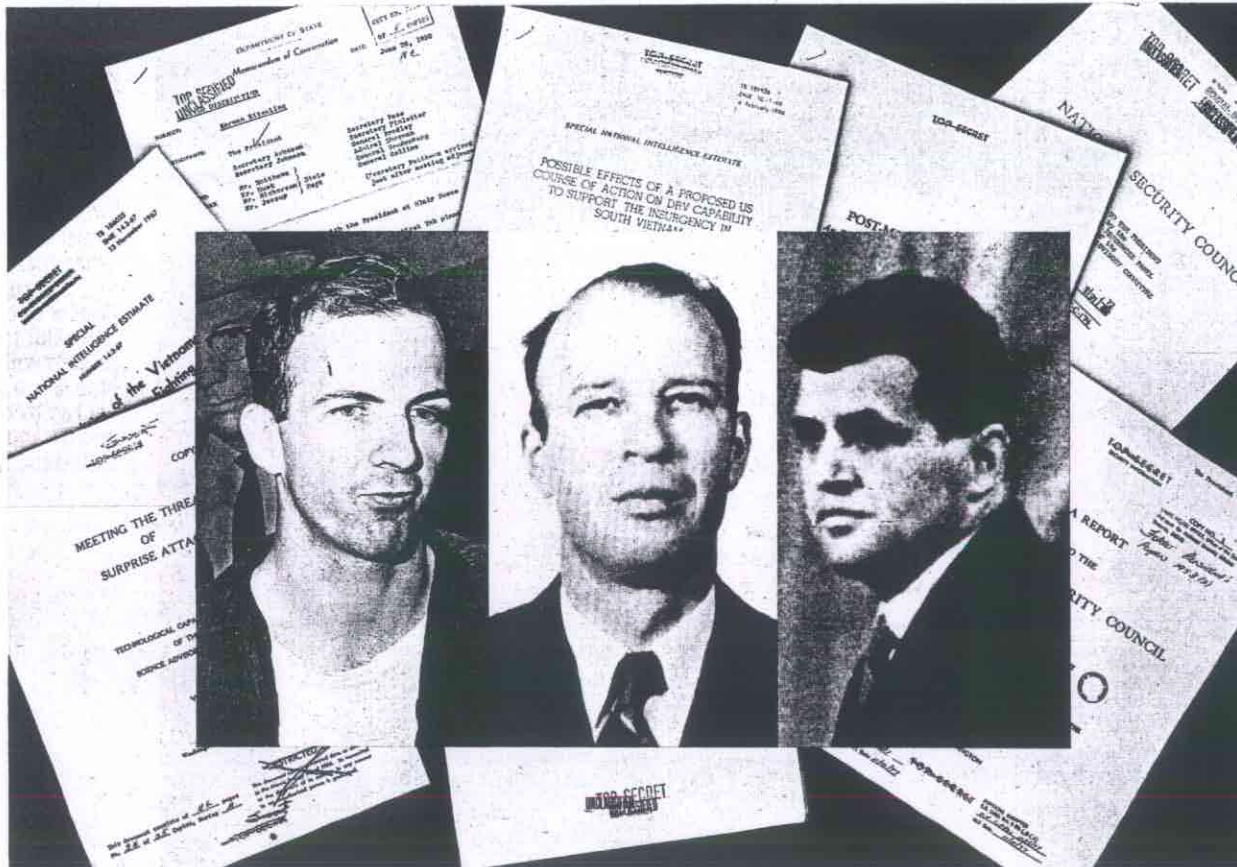




William Buchanan's Carrollton Press, which sells former U.S. secrets to any and all customers, regularly scoops news media. Carrollton subscribers were among first to know of Lee Harvey

Oswald's (l) plan to kill Richard Nixon, CIA drug experiments which led to the death of Dr. Frank Olson (c), official doubts over terms for Soviet release of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers.

The Man Who Sells Broken Secrets

by Joseph E. Persico

In December 1976, a man in a shapeless gray suit entered a suburban building within sight of the nation's capital. In an office on the ninth floor he peeled \$2000 from a thick roll of bills and left carrying a cardboard box. In it were thousands of microfilmed documents marked "Secret" and "Top Secret." The man was an official of the Soviet embassy. The ninth-floor office belonged to the Carrollton Press, Inc. And the transaction was completely legitimate.

The Soviet Union was merely one among hundreds of subscribers to a highly unusual publishing venture—an enterprise possible only in a society as open as the United States's. Carrollton's Declassified Documents Reference System sells recently unveiled official secrets from the files of the

Joseph E. Persico discovered the Carrollton Press, Inc., while writing "Piercing the Reich: The Penetration of Nazi Germany by American Secret Agents During World War II" (Viking Press).

CIA, FBI, Pentagon, State Department and other federal agencies. The idea was born in the fertile imagination of William Walter Buchanan, a former CIA officer and Carrollton's founder.

Buchanan, 50, left the CIA in 1957. After several years as a management consultant and publishing executive, he formed the Carrollton Press in 1967. Initially, the firm published indexes to scholarly journals and innocuous government documents of interest primarily to libraries.

Then, in 1974, Congress overhauled the Freedom of Information Act. Suddenly, thousands of official secrets were being declassified. "I knew," Buchanan says, "that there was no way for scholars, libraries or ordinary citizens to find out which documents were available. Nobody in the government even knew."

In time-honored American entrepreneurial tradition, Buchanan saw an unmet need and filled it. He hired Annadel Wile, a former information-processing expert with the CIA, and the Carrollton Press began purchasing copies of declassified documents.

These were summarized, indexed, reproduced on microfilm and offered initially to those libraries able to meet the stiff subscription rates: \$560 for documents declassified in a particular year, \$3950 for the 16,000 documents in the complete collection.

Today, the Declassified Documents Reference System regularly scoops the major news and publishing media. In September 1977, for example, newspapers, wire services and magazines carried a story—gleaned from a new book, *Marina and Lee*—reporting that Lee Harvey Oswald had planned to kill Richard Nixon in Dallas months before Oswald assassinated President Kennedy. Subscribers to the Carrollton service knew about the Nixon threat a full year before it came out in the popular press. The story appeared among 325 Oswald-related documents which the Carrollton Press had legally obtained from government files.

In the spring of 1978, *Legend: The Secret Life of Lee Harvey Oswald*, a heavily promoted book by Edward Jay Epstein, shed new light on Oswald's life in the Soviet Union. The informa-

tion was not news, however, to Carrollton subscribers who had read about Oswald's Russian sojourn 18 months before the book came out.

The Carrollton report included a verbatim transcript of the diary Oswald kept, poor spelling and all. An Oct. 21, 1959, entry, for example, gives Oswald's reaction upon being denied Soviet citizenship: "I decided to end it. Soak ristin cold water to numb the pain. Than slash my left wrist. Than plang wrist into bathtub of hot water. . . . Somewhere, a violin plays, as I watch my life whirl away." Soviet officials found Oswald bleeding to death and rushed him to a hospital in time to save him. One can only speculate on the course of history had they arrived an hour later.

Subscribers to the Declassified Documents Reference System can also read of Oswald's bitterness when his proposal of marriage was rejected by Ella, a beautiful Russian Jew: "I realize she was never serious with me, but only exploited my being an American to get the envy of the other girls who consider me different from the Russian

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

Boys. I am miserable!"

In July 1977, the Washington Post carried a headline: "CIA Papers Detail Secret Experiments on Behavior Control." Subscribers to the Carrollton system already had those CIA papers, including a firsthand account of what happened on Nov. 19, 1953, in a two-story log cabin at Deer Creek Lake in Maryland: "On Thursday evening, it was decided to experiment with the drug LSD and for the members present to administer the drug... to ascertain the effect a clandestine application would have on a meeting or a conference."

The report stated that "a very small dose" of LSD was placed in a bottle of Cointreau. One man who drank unwittingly from the bottle was Dr. Frank Olson, an Army civilian employee who thereafter went into a state of depression and, 10 days after the drug experiment, plunged to his death from a New York City hotel room.

Another Carrollton document reveals some CIA thinking at the time regarding the potential of drugs. "Some of the individuals in the agency had to know tremendous amounts of information, and if a way could be found to produce amnesias... after the individual left the agency—it would be a remarkable thing."

The Declassified Documents Reference System also scooped The New York Times as well as a number of other major dailies and television news departments on these former secrets: that U.S. forces stood ready in 1964 to back up a military coup against Brazil's civilian government; that the Soviet Union probably suffered several nuclear power plant accidents in the late 1950's and early 1960's; and that the U.S. Army Chemical Corps had had studies done to learn how synthetic marijuana might be mass-produced as a chemical warfare agent.

Some newspapers, to make sure that no potential news from the Declassified Documents Reference System slips past them, have become subscribers. These include such distant journalistic cousins as The New York Times and the National Enquirer.

Numerous foreign governments be-

sides the Soviet Union are interested in America's obsolete secrets. In a letter postmarked "Peking," a Mr. Huang Fu-sheng, book buyer for the Chinese Communist regime, requested six subscriptions, one of the largest single orders Carrollton has received. Other governments buying America's once-hidden files include Brazil, Britain, Finland, France, Iran, Norway, Switzerland and West Germany.

U.S. officials have no better way of knowing what government papers have been declassified than to subscribe to the Carrollton service. Bu-

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chanan's government customers include the Department of State, the CIA, all three armed forces, their service academies and several military libraries—a total of 12 Defense Department subscriptions alone.

The backbone of the business, however, is the hundreds of library subscribers. Although Buchanan is reluctant to reveal the exact figure, he maintains that the majority of large university and research libraries in the United States now receive some part of the Declassified Documents Reference System.

A visitor to a subscriber library can read the original discussions between the State Department and the CIA as they arranged to have U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, who had been shot down in 1960 and convicted by the Russians, exchanged for Soviet super spy Col. Rudolf Abel. Reading this file, one has the impression that American officials were not at all certain they were getting the best of the bargain: "It is a fact



WILLIAM BUCHANAN

On his office wall, in prominent view, a poster reads: "Public access to government documents is essential to the successful operation of a democracy."

that Colonel Abel was, and probably continues to be, an important cog in that [Soviet] apparatus. His release at this time, when he has served only a portion of his sentence, would be of value to Soviet intelligence."

Another document still causes a chill 29 years after it was written. In it, the CIA's first chief, Rear Adm. R. H. Hillenkoeter, reports on Sept. 9, 1949: "Samples of air masses recently collected over the North Pacific have shown an abnormal radioactive contamination." Thus did the United States receive the first evidence that the Soviet Union had developed an atom bomb.

For zanier reading, there is "Hoodwink," an FBI scheme to spark a war between the Mafia and the American Communist Party. As described by the project's authors: "The Communist Party U.S.A. and La Cosa Nostra come in contact with each other in the labor

field, where hoodlums operate businesses under 'sweatshop' conditions. By making it appear that the Party is attacking hoodlum labor practices . . . we could provoke a bitter dispute between the organizations."

The battle was to be touched off by having FBI agents send phony Communist Party leaflets to Mafia leaders attacking unfair labor practices in enterprises they owned. This ploy, supposedly, would send the mobsters on a vindictive rampage.

Carrollton staff members are in an excellent position to determine if the "Secret" stamp has been used foolishly or to hide blunders and avoid political embarrassment. Elizabeth Jones, managing editor for the Carrollton system, cites as examples of documents which were once classified a Christmas greeting to the troops abroad and a dispute as to whether dogs trained to guard Vietnamese villages may have ended up as a Montagnard delicacy.

Over the past 10 years, Carrollton Press has grown from a one-man operation to some 50 employees, half of whom occupy comfortable offices in Rosslyn, a Washington suburb. The other half work out of an ancient building in Inverness, Scotland, where skilled indexers are available at far lower cost than in America. Combining doggedness, ingenuity and carefully cultivated connections, the staff continues to acquire the latest declassified secrets well before others.

Publisher Buchanan has anticipated the criticism of those who think it unethical to make sensitive material available to all comers, even America's adversaries. "Responsible American officials," he says, "have already evaluated every document in our collection and have made a legal determination that its disclosure is no longer a threat to the nation's security. Once such a document is declassified, it can

appear in a newspaper or on television just as easily as in our collection. No foreign government has scored any intelligence coup by subscribing to the Declassified Documents Reference System."

The real value of his enterprise, Buchanan says, is to scholars and writers. "Our service gets the truth out. It clears up misconceptions. Having this material accessible to the scholarly community does far more good than harm."

Buchanan likes to point to a poster prominently displayed in his office. It reads: "Public access to government documents is essential to the successful operation of a democracy." The words are those of Rep. William Moorhead (D., Pa.), author of key amendments to the Freedom of Information Act.

Buchanan also notes the irony that one need not be an American citizen to request that material be declassified. "Under our law, Fidel Castro could petition the CIA to declassify all documents in their files which mention his name. But I'm not sure what kind of service he would get."

As for speculation that the Carrollton Press is a front for his old CIA

employers, Buchanan dismisses the idea with a laugh: "There were times when I wished it were. Then we would have known for sure that some money was coming in."

The Declassified Documents Reference System, Buchanan points out, represents only a small portion of the Carrollton Press's overall operations. The firm's principal business continues to be publishing indexes with such unalarming titles as the "Cumulative Subject Index to the Monthly Catalogue of U.S. Government Publications 1900-1971." Buchanan views his reference system as something between a duty and a labor of love. The effort, he says, is only now beginning to show a modest profit.

Buchanan's fellow professionals apparently have no qualms about the propriety or value of his trading in old official confidences. The Information Industry Association named as co-winner of its 1978 award Carrollton's Declassified Documents Reference System "for its usefulness, innovation and responsiveness to the information needs of a changing society."

America's dealer in used secrets sets a high standard for the future. He is working, Buchanan says, toward the day when "scholars and authors who intend to write seriously about events since World War II have to consult our Declassified Documents Reference System. Otherwise, they may miss vital information, unavailable from conventional sources, and risk having their scholarship judged incomplete." 